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H AS A MUTE IN LATIN.

BY E. S. SHELDON.

WHY did the Latin grammarians count *h* as one of the mutes? As this doubtless goes back to a time before *h* had universally or prevailingly ceased to be pronounced at all, we cannot admit the somewhat punning answer that it was because *h* was really mute or silent, expressing no sound. Perhaps the explanation is rather to be found by considering the nature of the sound itself. As a mere breathing *h* had no clear and distinct sound which could be prolonged and easily recognized as an element of speech like *f* or *s*; if it was prolonged, the result was only almost inaudible breath, and its effect as a consonant was plainly noticeable only when a vowel immediately followed, so as to produce a contrast between unvoiced breath and voice.¹ It was accordingly perceptible merely as a *Vocaleinsatz* (see Sievers, *Phonetik*, 4th ed., cap. 17, p. 138 ff.), and as such gave the effect of a momentary consonant, and was classed with the other momentary consonants, the *mutae*, rather than with the continuous consonants, the *semivocales*. Like the former it was regularly accompanied by a vowel, and probably seemed to the Roman grammarians as unpronounceable without a vowel as *b*, *c*, *d*, etc. Having the letter in common use they had to class it either as a *muta* or as a *semivocalis*, and could not altogether ignore this speech-sound in their classification of the letters, as the Greek grammarians could and did. The Latin classification may have been influenced, however, also by the fact that the Greek

¹ In this connection I may note that some nineteen or twenty years ago, while speaking with a German student at the University of Berlin, I illustrated to him the untrilled English *r* by pronouncing it without voice and alone. He said he heard nothing. Yet the breath rustle was probably more audible than that of *h*, and he would not have failed to hear an *r* before a vowel in my English pronunciation. His own *r* was trilled with the tip of the tongue.

aspirates, ϕ , θ , χ , represented in Latin spelling by *ph*, *th*, *ch*, were usually classed among the mutes, and I will not omit to add that by counting *h* as a mute the Latin grammarians brought their number of *mutae* up to nine (*b, c, d, g, h, k, p, q, t*), the number recognized for Greek.